

SOUND OFF!



VOL. I, NO 24

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

10 JULY 2006

FIRST CALL - THEME OF THE ISSUE AND/OR CLIPS & QUOTES

CHASING GHOSTS

In yet another departure from the norm, I want to devote the editorial space in this issue to one more book report, and tell you about the “rest of the story” as it is told in a very good book, *Chasing Ghosts*, by Paul Rieckhoff. Paul is the founder of [Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America \(IAVA\)](#), formerly Operation Truth..

Whereas *Cobra II*, reviewed last issue, told the story of the high-level planning for the war, and the implementation at the operational level, Paul tells the story at the tactical level, where the sweat, sand, wind and IEDs are part of the cast, if not the major players.

Paul starts the tale with his flight to Kuwait to join the war. He spends the first chapter letting loose some rather pointed remarks about the decisions that had been made to get him and his men to that point, and pulls no punches on what he thought at the time and what he thinks now about those decisions.

As you might expect, his initial hopes were that the President and his advisors were dead right, and that they were all going for the right reasons. Those hopes are tenuous, and are ultimately shattered.

Paul goes on to tell the story of his 38-man platoon, and its 10 months in Iraq, beginning just a month after the invasion. He really tells that story at the platoon level, from their perspective, which is always from the bottom looking up and out.

He tells about his soldiers as people, some aware of the world around them and some not so aware. Ordinary American kids. He talks about their ideas and their prejudices in a way that gets you down on the ground with them. His narrative of their daily life will resonate with anyone who has spent time in a tent or a hooch, particularly in a combat zone.

Paul makes these folks real. Frankly, I recognized fellow soldiers from the Vietnam War, it's just that their names had changed and they were 35 years younger.

As you read through the book you get to experience the change of heart and the growing awareness that, regardless of the rightness or wrongness of the decision to go to war, we really didn't do a good job of virtually anything other than just beating the hell out of the Iraqi Army and Republican Guard, wherever we found them. As far as the stabilization of the nation goes - providing security, providing community support - Paul tells multiple tales of how that could and did work sometimes at the personal level, but was a grand failure at the system and governmental level.

Unlike many tales of this war, in *Chasing Ghosts* you get to see the Iraqi people, both their good and bad sides. You see a far more

nuanced view of their character, and a somewhat more sympathetic view of their plight than you will in most accounts. Paul voices a sympathy that I believe many soldiers have for the people whose lives they are upending, but which they seldom voice, and certainly not as well as Paul has said it for them.

Towards the end he expresses a very sincere hope for the success of the Iraqi people and the nation of Iraq, although it is expressed with some genuine doubt about the possibilities. Out of that expression comes a real feeling for the reader that Paul connected while he was there, and didn't just go, do the job, and come home. That is part of the authenticity that shines everywhere in this really good book.

At the end of the book he briefly tells the story of going home and the beginnings of Operation Truth, which has since become IAVA. He also recounts some of his experiences in the 2004 presidential campaign, none of them very good.

I confess that I had a hard time putting this book down. It is a quick read and an authentic one.

In reminiscing with others about other wars the discussion always gets around to the impact on the senses. The sounds, feel, smells, tastes that go with war, and the inevitable flashback when one experiences even one of those sensations or a similar one later in life. The memories can come back even when someone describes a similar situation well. A sound or a smell or even just a feeling on the skin can trigger all sorts of very real sensations years later.

Having been in war, and having sent more than one bloody hot summer in the Middle East, I have to admit that through his words Paul was able to bring those sensations back to me very powerfully. I think that my reaction attests to the really good job of writing that he does here.

I have read a few reviews of this book, and only one that I found was derogatory. Publishers Weekly didn't like Paul's personal asides and opinions. Well they missed the point. This is a personal story - a battle memoir - personally told by someone who obviously respected the men he led, who respected the people he was trying to protect, and who wanted to tell their tale clearly and very personally.

It is also the tale of a man who loves his country and who would probably say with Carl Schurz, the Senator from Missouri and Civil War veteran, **“My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right.”**

You can get *Chasing Ghosts* at your bookstore, but for just about the same price you can get a signed copy at the IAVA website; that's where I got mine. Just [click here](#) to order.

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN, FREE, AND VERY WORTHWHILE! GET YOUR FELLOW VETERANS, AND VETERANS' FAMILY MEMBERS TO JOIN VUFT! WE ARE BEGINNING TO BE HEARD, AND WE NEED YOU TO HELP US GET THE MESSAGE OUT. IF EACH OF US WOULD BRING IN ONE NEW MEMBER EVERY MONTH, WHAT AN IMPACT WE COULD HAVE!

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT WWW.VUFT.ORG. CHECK OUT THE "CANDIDATES" PAGE, WHICH IS OUR EFFORT TO LIST ALL VETERANS RUNNING FOR STATE-WIDE AND FEDERAL OFFICE IN THE U.S.; IT IS BEING UPDATED DAILY. PLEASE HELP US MAKE THIS AS COMPLETE A LIST AS POSSIBLE BY SENDING CANDIDATE INFO TO SANDY.COOK@VUFT.ORG.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

TAX DEDUCTIBLE STATUS! We have just been advised of the approval of our tax deductible status! This is a very big victory. The IRS has approved us as a 501(c)(4) for 2005, and starting 1 January 2006 – i.e. retroactive to the start of this year – we are a 501(c)(3). This means that all donations to VUFT Inc. from 1 January 2006 on are not only tax exempt to the organization, but are tax-deductible to the donor.

There was quite a bit of negotiation with the IRS on this status change. The IRS was very helpful, but we did have to jump through a hoop or two. We had originally applied for designation as a 501(c)(17), but the rules prohibiting lobbying made that form of tax organization impossible for us. Also, the membership limitations that that form forced us to live under meant that we had to have 90% wartime era veterans at all times. Now we can have veterans of any period, families, and non-veteran supporters without regard to percentages.

Because lobbying is an important matter for us, we have taken what is called a 501(h) election which allows us to lobby freely as long as we do not spend more than 20% of our income on lobbying expenses.

We have rewritten our Articles of Incorporation and have had them approved by the State of California. The change places more emphasis on charitable work, and supports our 501(c)(3) status.

We are looking for opportunities for veteran-related charitable work, so suggestions are welcome. We do not want to be just another redundant charity, however, so our initial efforts are going to be in the area of helping veterans who have run hard up against the system and are not getting served. We will be assisting them in getting help – mostly *pro bono* we hope – to file appeals, or to find alternative ways of getting the support they need. This initial effort has tentatively been dubbed **Operation Redoubt**, where redoubt stands for the last line of defense.

There will be much more about this in the future both in this newsletter and on the web site.

Volunteers who work on our various projects will be able to deduct their reasonable expenses (although not their time) as a charitable contribution. So mileage (at \$.14/mile for 2006), hotel bills, food while on organization business, and telephone calls, as examples, are all deductible. As long as the charges are reasonable, they do not have to meet the "business expense" rules.

The website will be modified shortly so that those who wish to donate to the cause can do so and have adequate documentation that their contributions have gone to a legitimate tax-deductible cause.

NEW MEMBERS are joining us every week. If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to our website at www.vuft.org/membership.html and join. Membership is free. The more our numbers grow, the greater voice we have with legislators. It shouldn't be that way, but it is, so join us and help us take the fight to Congress and the state legislatures. Please encourage your friends who either are veterans, are related to veterans, or who support veterans' causes to join VUFT, Inc.

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE

If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on our website "Join" page. Every little bit helps. With our favorable ruling on our status as a 501(c)(3), your donations are deductible on your federal taxes. You can also buy our handsome pins using the same method.

If you wish to volunteer your services to the organization, please contact the Chair at rhandy@vuft.org or the Vice Chair at scCook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

WE HAVE LAMENTED THE LOSS TO ALL VETERANS OF THE SERVICES OF REPRESENTATIVE LANE EVANS WHO IS RETIRING FROM CONGRESS. THE FOLLOWING LETTER FROM CONGRESSMAN EVANS WAS SHARED WITH US.

June 27, 2006

Ms. Rita Hawkins
Florida, U.S.A.

Dear Ms. Hawkins:

Thank you for your kind letter regarding my decision to retire from Congress. I was deeply touched by your support and well wishes.

It has been an incredible honor and blessing to represent the 17th Congressional District of Illinois and veterans everywhere for the past 24 years. Because this job means so much to me, the decision to retire was not an easy one to make. Every day I spent in Congress was rewarding and I am proud of what I was able to accomplish with supportive constituents, hardworking veterans organizations, wonderful colleagues, and a dedicated staff. I only wish we could have done more with the time we had; there is still so much work that needs to be done.

When I announced in 1998 that I had Parkinson's disease, my doctor said this condition would not interfere with my work and I would be able to perform at a high level for a number of years. That window of opportunity is now closing. I have come to recognize that the time needed to address my health makes it difficult to wage a campaign and carry out my work as representative.

Parkinson's disease may have forced me to retire but I will never stop fighting for veterans - for the benefits they deserve, and the healthcare they so desperately need.

Again, I appreciate your support throughout the years, and although we may or may not have met, your words of encouragement are felt across the country. One of my favorite poets, William Butler Yeats, once wrote, "Think where man's glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was I had such friends." No man has had better friends than Lane Evans.

To my constituents, friends, and veterans across this country, I thank you once again for walking with me on this journey and for your cherished friendship.

Semper Fi,

LANE EVANS
Member of Congress

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

CRAIG'S THREE BILLS FOR VETERANS ADVANCE

June 23, 2006 (Washington, DC) Three bills sponsored by U.S. Senator Larry Craig to improve benefits for veterans were approved Thursday by the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Among the legislation is an omnibus bill which includes a provision to allow veterans to hire attorneys to represent them in claims before the Department of Veterans Affairs, another bill to increase pay for disabled veterans, and a bill which authorizes the construction of VA hospitals throughout the country. All three measures now go to the floor of the Senate for further consideration. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/senatecvanews/senatecvanews06-23-06-2.htm>

HOUSE APPROVES HERSETH AMENDMENT FOR VETERANS ASSISTANCE

Increases Funding to Help Recent Vets Start and Operate Own Business

June 28, 2006, Washington, D.C. – The U.S. House of Representatives today approved an amendment offered by Rep. Stephanie Herseth (D-SD), Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA) and Rep. Lane Evans (D-IL) to increase funding for the National Veterans Business Development Corporation. The Corporation helps recent veterans who want to start and operate their own business after they return from military service. <More at: www.house.gov/herseth/press_062806_vets.htm>

VIRGINIA EXTENDS BENEFITS TO MILITARY FAMILIES

Donna Miles - American Forces Press Service - June 21, 2006

Defense Department officials are heralding several measures adopted this week by the commonwealth of Virginia in support of the military, including one that will extend in-state college tuition rates to the children of servicemembers stationed there. Some 3,500 military children could potentially benefit from the new benefit, signed into law June 19 by Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine in Richmond, officials said.

"As the second-most military-populous state in the nation, this is indeed a meaningful accomplishment," Leslye Arsht, deputy undersecretary of defense for military community and family policy, said during the bill-signing ceremony.
<More at: www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2006/20060621_5471.html>

AFTER LAST ISSUE'S REPORT OF FAILURES ACROSS THE BOARD IN VETERANS' AMENDMENTS TO THE NDAA, IT IS NICE TO SEE A SUCCESS OR TWO, AND SOME REAL BIPARTISAN ACTION

AMENDMENTS TO NDAA 2007 (S. 2766)

1. Amendment S. 4224

Sponsor: Sen Obama, Barack [IL] (submitted 6/14/2006) (proposed 6/22/2006)

AMENDMENT PURPOSE: To include assessments of Traumatic Brain Injury in the post-deployment health assessments of member of the Armed Forces returning from deployment in support of a contingency operation.

STATUS: 6/22/2006: Amendment SA 4224 proposed by Senator Levin for Senator Obama. (consideration: CR [S6346-6366](#); text: CR [S6348](#))

6/22/2006: Amendment SA 4224 **agreed to in Senate by Unanimous Consent.**

COSPONSORS(6):

Sen Snowe, Olympia J. [ME]
Sen Lautenberg, Frank R. [NJ]

Sen Frist, William H. [TN]
Sen Salazar, Ken [CO]

Sen Murray, Patty [WA]
Sen Durbin, Richard [IL]

2. Amendment S. 4409

Sponsor: Sen Obama, Barack [IL] (introduced 6/21/2006)

Amendment Purpose: To require a report on the provision of an electronic copy of military records to members of the Armed Forces upon their discharge or release from the Armed Forces.

Status: Latest Major Action: 6/22/2006 Senate amendment agreed to. Status: Amendment SA 4409 **agreed to in Senate by Unanimous Consent.**

Cosponsors:

Sen. Bond

Sen. Boxer

Sen. Carper

3. Amendment S. 4466

Sponsor: Sen. Boxer, Barbara [CA] (introduced 6/21/2006)

Amendment Purpose: To improve mental health screening and services for members of the Armed Forces.

Status: Latest Major Action: 6/22/2006 Senate amendment agreed to. Status: Amendment SA 4466 **agreed to in Senate by Unanimous Consent.**

Cosponsors:

Sen. Lieberman

Sen. Clinton

Sen. Kennedy

\$1,000 SAVINGS: MILITARY MEMBERS TO GET BREAK ON STATE INCOME TAX

The Arizona Republic 07.06.2006

Active-duty military personnel who call Arizona home won't have to pay state income taxes for the next two years.

There are about 6,000 active-duty military personnel at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base and a similar number at Fort Huachuca. The break relates to where the military members claim residency, which might not be where they are based.

The elimination of the tax on active-duty military could mean about \$1,000 in savings, said Col. Tom Jones, commander of Luke Air Force Base. He based that on average pay of \$35,000. www.azcentral.com/business/articles/0704biz-talker0704.html

THE U.S. MILITARY'S MANPOWER CRISIS

Frederick W. Kagan - June 21, 2006 - Foreign Affairs - (July/August 2006)

Three hundred forty-five million dollars can, roughly speaking, buy one F-22 Raptor--the U.S. military's new stealth fighter plane--or pay the average annual cost of 3,000 soldiers (although it would cost far more to equip, maintain, and deploy either the fighter or the troops). The soldiers are a better investment. Yet U.S. military personnel, pundits, and policymakers have been downplaying the importance of ground forces since 1991. Even today, in the face of ongoing, manpower-intensive counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush administration is emphasizing long-range strike capabilities over land forces. The recently released 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review and the president's budget proposal for fiscal year 2007 both reaffirm this priority.

The administration has maintained this emphasis despite the fact that the long-term neglect of U.S. ground forces has caused serious problems in the Iraqi and Afghan campaigns. If not corrected, moreover, this neglect will cause even worse problems in the future. War is fundamentally a human activity, and attempts to remove humans from its center--as recent trends and current programs do--are likely to lead to disaster. <More at: www.aei.org/publications/filter.all.pubID.24584/pub_detail.asp>

ARMY RAISES MAXIMUM ENLISTMENT AGE TO 42

From Army News Service - Jun 26 2006

The Army has raised the enlistment age to 42 (for Active Duty, Reserves, and Army National Guard), made possible under provisions of the [Fiscal Year 2006 National Defense Authorization Act](#).

The Army raised the active-duty age limit to 40 in January as an interim step while it worked out the additional medical screening requirements for recruits ages 40 to 42. Before January, an applicant could not have reached his or her 35th birthday. The Army Reserve age limit was raised from 35 to 40 in March 2005. <More at: <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/armyjoin/a/enlage42.htm>>

MEDICAL RECRUITING FALLS

Tom Philpott | July 06, 2006

Army, Navy Medical Scholarships Go Begging

The number of medical students accepting Army and Navy scholarships has fallen sharply over the last two years, in part because of the mayhem in Iraq as depicted in daily news reports, say service medical leaders.

A scholarship program that the Army surgeon general calls "our lifeblood, over time, for recruiting physicians," is failing to attract enough qualified applicants by wide margins, except in the Air Force. Difficulties in recruiting the next generation of Army and Navy physicians and dentists have spurred the Senate to approve new authorities to increase dramatically medical bonuses and stipends. <More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,104359,00.html>

GENERALS, IRAQIS WILL DECIDE TROOP STRENGTH

White House says reported pullout plan 'under consideration'

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- President Bush said Monday the U.S. troop presence in Iraq will be determined by military commanders, the Iraqi government and "conditions on the ground."

Bush's remarks followed a New York Times report Sunday that Gen. George Casey, the top U.S. military commander in Iraq, plans to send home about 7,000 of the 127,000 American troops there by September without replacing them.

About 30,000 additional troops -- eight or nine brigades -- would leave by the end of 2007, the Times reported, citing unnamed U.S. officials. <More at: www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/06/26/iraq.troops/index.html>

IRAQIS SAY US EXIT PLAN SHOULD AWAIT SECURITY

Scott Peterson and Awadh al-Taei - Jun 27

News of a possible US military reduction in Iraq, beginning as early as this fall, is being met in Baghdad with the deep skepticism of a war-weary people who have witnessed many other American exit plans go unfulfilled.

Most Iraqis want an end to the 127,000-strong US presence, which they consider an occupation. But they are concerned, too, that Iraqi forces, while growing in size and capability, still can't cope with the insurgency and sectarian killings that have killed tens of thousands of Iraqis.

"I want the Americans to leave as soon as possible, so the reason to attack Iraqi troops will end, because insurgents are always accusing us of being agents and supporting these foreign troops," a first lieutenant of Iraq's Interior Ministry said Monday, while commanding a checkpoint on Baghdad's airport road.

"Before they leave, they should destroy the [sectarian] militias and make sure the security elements are strong," says the officer. "I don't want them to leave completely; they should stay in bases. But if they don't lower their numbers, we will pressure them to do so." <More at: www.csmonitor.com/2006/0627/p01s03-woiq.html>

NATION IS DIVIDED ON DRAWDOWN OF TROOPS

Dan Balz and Richard Morin - Washington Post Staff Writers - June 27, 2006; A01

With military commanders weighing possible troop reductions in Iraq, Americans are sharply divided along partisan lines over whether to set a deadline for withdrawing all U.S. forces there, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll.

About half, 51 percent, oppose a deadline for getting out of Iraq, but the margin has dwindled as insurgents have continued to kill U.S. troops. The poll found that 47 percent now favor some kind of deadline, up eight percentage points since December. Two thirds of Democrats support setting a deadline, more than double the proportion of Republicans who want a timetable for withdrawal. Among independents, 44 percent support a deadline.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/26/AR2006062600250.html>

STOLEN VA LAPTOP TURNED IN TO FBI

By Steven Donald Smith - American Forces Press Service - June 29, 2006

The stolen Department of Veterans Affairs laptop computer and hard drive containing the personal information of more than 26 million veterans were turned in to the FBI yesterday, the Veterans Affairs secretary said before Congress today.

Reports indicate that the FBI has made a preliminary determination that data contained on the computer and hard drive has not been accessed. <More at: www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2006/20060629_5550.html>

RUMSFELD SUBPOENAED OVER ABU GHRAIB

PETER URBAN - Connecticut Post

A Congressional committee subpoenaed Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Friday at the request of U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays. Shays (R-CN) sought the subpoena after the Pentagon refused to answer questions regarding allegations that an Army whistleblower faced retaliation for discussing abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison.

Shays, chairman of the House Government Reform subcommittee on national security, is investigating allegations made by Army Spec. Samuel Provance that his attempts to provide information to investigators about prison abuses were rebuffed and that he then was retaliated against for providing unclassified information to the media.

"The bottom line is it's critical that our oversight inquiries be taken seriously by executive branch departments and that we get timely access to the information we need to do our job," Shays said. "Today we are demanding that the Department of Defense provide information that is critical to our investigation."

In March, Shays and Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., the ranking Democrat on the committee, sent a letter to Rumsfeld seeking information related to testimony Provance provided the subcommittee a month earlier. The letter went unanswered.

<More at: www.connpost.com/news/ci_4004954>

HATE GROUPS ARE INFILTRATING THE MILITARY, GROUP ASSERTS

John Kifner - July 7, 2006

A decade after the Pentagon declared a zero-tolerance policy for racist hate groups, recruiting shortfalls caused by the war in Iraq have allowed "large numbers of neo-Nazis and skinhead extremists" to infiltrate the military, according to a watchdog organization.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks racist and right-wing militia groups, estimated that the numbers could run into the thousands, citing interviews with Defense Department investigators and reports and postings on racist Web sites and magazines.

"We've got Aryan Nations graffiti in Baghdad," the group quoted a Defense Department investigator as saying in a report to be posted today on its Web site, www.splcenter.org. "That's a problem."

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2006/07/07/washington/07recruit.html>

DOD SHIFTS BILLIONS FOR PAY, NEW SYSTEMS

InsideDefense.com NewsStand | Jason Sherman and Jen DiMascio | July 07, 2006

The Defense Department is seeking permission from Congress to shift \$4.4 billion between dozens of accounts in order to prevent paychecks from bouncing during the final months of the fiscal year and to launch a few new-start weapons programs, including an effort to prevent B-2 bombers from crashing. <More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,104635,00.html>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Purpose
8/10-8/13		Seattle. WA – place TBD	National Convention	Veterans for Peace	Periodic Meeting

Let us know about meetings and gatherings and we will advertise them

Note: We are a non-partisan organization that does not take a position, as an organization, on this war. We will advertise all veterans' events, regardless of purpose.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

A REAL PROBLEM FOR THE NEW VETERANS

HOMELESSNESS A THREAT FOR IRAQ VETS

Verena Dobnik - Forbes - Jul 05, 2006

Herold Noel had nowhere to call home after returning from military service in Iraq. He slept in his Jeep, taking care to find a parking space where he wouldn't get a ticket.

"Then the nightmares would start," says the 26-year-old former Army private first class, who drove a fuel truck in Iraq. "I saw a baby decapitated when it was run over by a truck - I relived that every night."

Across America on any given evening, hundreds of veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan like Noel are homeless, according to government estimates.

The reasons for their plight are many. For some, residual stress from daily insurgent attacks and roadside bombs makes it tough to adjust to civilian life; some can't navigate government assistance programs; others simply can't afford a house or apartment.

They are living on the edge in towns and cities big and small, from Washington state to California and Florida. Some of the hardest hit are in New York City, where housing costs "can be very tough," says Peter Dougherty, head of the federal government's Homeless Veterans Program. Studio apartments routinely exceed \$1,000 a month - no small sum for veterans trying to land on their feet. <More at: www.forbes.com/technology/feeds/ap/2006/07/04/ap2857273.html>

VETERANS FACE ANOTHER BATTLE

Corky Siemaszko - Jun. 26, 2006 - New York Daily News

Homeless shelters see more soldiers from Iraqi, Afghan wars

NEW YORK - Ten years after the United States pulled out of Vietnam, an army of shell-shocked veterans began reporting to homeless shelters.

Now those desperate ranks are being joined by veterans of conflicts where the guns are still blazing -- the Iraq and Afghan wars.

And social workers fear the trickle of stunned soldiers returning from Baghdad and Kabul has the potential to become a tragic tide.

"The Iraq vets are showing up now, and asking for help now," said Yogin Ricardo Singh of the Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Black Veterans for Social Justice. "What surprises me is how young they are." <More at:

AND FOR THE OLD VETERANS

DOWNWARD SPIRAL LANDS VETERAN IN SHELTER

Amanda Keister - The Daily News - Jun 28, 2006

SUNBURY — Kimber Wynn is a combat veteran of World War II and Korea. He retired at age 75 from a well-paying job where he had worked for decades.

Yet Mr. Wynn is homeless. A recent addition of Haven Ministries, Mr. Wynn may not consider himself homeless anymore, but according to the federal government, his residency in a homeless shelter makes him one of more than half a million homeless veterans in the United States.

"People don't understand that homelessness can happen to anyone," said Cathy Teisher, executive director at Haven Ministries, an agency of the United Way of the Central Susquehanna Valley. "Most people are two paychecks away from knocking on the door here." <More at: www.veteransforamerica.org/index.cfm/Page/Article/ID/7427>

IS THIS THE WAY IT IS SUPPOSED TO BE? **IS THIS THE WAY WE WANT IT TO BE?**

MILITARY FAILS SOME WIDOWS OVER BENEFITS

Lizette Alvarez - June 27, 2006

As Holly Wren coped with her 6-month-old son and the sorrow of losing her husband in Iraq last November, she assumed that the military's sense of structure and order would apply in death as it had in life. Instead she encountered numerous hurdles in trying to collect survivor benefits. She received only half the amount owed her for housing because her husband, one of the highest ranking soldiers to die in Iraq, was listed as single, childless and living in Florida — wrong on every count. Lt. Col. Thomas Wren was married, with five children, and living in Northern Virginia.

She waited months for her husband's retirement money and more than two weeks for his death benefit, meant to arrive within days. And then Mrs. Wren went to court to become her son's legal guardian because no one had told her husband that a minor cannot be a beneficiary. "You are a number, and your husband is a number" said Mrs. Wren, who ultimately asked her congressman for help. "They need to understand that we are more than that."

For military widows, many of them young, stay-at-home mothers, the shock of losing a husband is often followed by the confounding task of untangling a collection of benefits from assorted bureaucracies.

<More at: www.truthout.org/docs_2006/062706E.shtml>

WOMEN AT WAR: MENTAL HEALTH TOLL UNKNOWN

Amy Cox - CNN - Jul 07, 2006

"In the civilian world, post-traumatic stress disorder has traditionally been much more common in women than in men," says Col. Elspeth Cameron Ritchie, the psychiatry consultant to the U.S. Army surgeon general.

"This is the first time that we've really had a large number of women that are over in a combat zone so we are studying how they do, but the results aren't out yet."

... "The VA currently does not have any specialized care program for female combat veterans," Robinson says. "And our VA health care system is based on males who go to war. ... It's different now."

"Men and women are different. We handle things differently; we perceive things differently," he continues. "I'm not saying women can't cut it because they can. Some of the best Special Operations warriors we have are females ... but there's a difference."

Ritchie also sees some differences in women adjusting to home life again after Iraq, especially those with children.

"Based on anecdotal evidence, not formal data, women who are mothers, especially with younger children ... tend to feel guilty being away from their children," she says. "This is where we really don't have a whole lot of data yet on re-integration."

<More at: www.cnn.com/2006/US/05/26/ch.women.vets/index.html>

VA CHALLENGED TO KEEP PACE FOR RURAL VETERANS' HEALTHCARE

June 27, 2006

Washington, D.C. — Today, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health heard testimony from Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Under Secretary for Health Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin on efforts to provide high quality health care to remote veterans in rural communities. One in five veterans who enroll to receive health care through VA lives in a rural area, and the health subcommittee is exploring ways to improve health care access for these veterans.

"VHA understands that although veterans in rural areas face many of the same health concerns as veterans in urban areas, rural area veterans often face additional challenges such as limited finances and fewer specialists," Perlin said, referring to VA's Veterans Health Administration, which he heads. Perlin reiterated that VA is committed to providing the highest quality of care to all veterans irrespective of where they live. <More at: www.house.gov/va/news/109/6-27-06.html>

WEB SITE LAUNCHED FOR JOB-SEEKING VETS

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - 2:22 PM HAST Monday

Iraq war veterans are struggling to find jobs when they return home, according to a recent survey by CareerBuilder.com.

Approximately 250,000 U.S. service members leave active duty each year and they are finding jobs are already filled and employers are unsure how military skills translate to the civilian working world. One in five veterans said it took six months or longer to find a job upon their return home, according to the survey. About one in 10 veterans said it took one year to find a job.

CareerBuilder.com is working in conjunction with federal and state government organizations and have launched a Web site to help veterans find employment.

OperationHeroForHire.com allows employers who want to recruit veterans to post their jobs for free.

TRICARE RESERVE SELECT OPEN SEASON

Military.com | July 07, 2006

FALLS CHURCH, Va. - TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) "open season" for Tier 2 and Tier 3 Selected Reserve members is Aug. 1 through Nov. 25, 2006. TRS is the premium-based health coverage offered by the Department of Defense similar to TRICARE Standard and TRICARE Extra. Last year, coverage (Tier 1) was only available to members of the National Guard and Reserve who served on active duty for more than 30 days in support of a contingency operation or after Sept. 11, 2001.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 expands TRS coverage to all qualified members of the Selected Reserve.

For additional information, members and family members may access TRS fact sheets, frequently asked questions, briefing slides and other educational materials on the TRICARE Web site at www.tricare.osd.mil/reserve/reserveselect.

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED JULY 6, 2006

This week, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps announced an increase in the number of reservists on active duty in support of the partial mobilization, while the Coast Guard number decreased. The net collective result is 1,842 more reservists mobilized than last week.

At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 84,128; Navy Reserve, 4,916; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 7,132; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,456; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 320. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 103,952, including both units and individual augmentees.

A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2006/d20060706ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 25 JUNE 2006

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	2,543
WOUNDED US [EST. NO DoD UPDATE SINCE 7/1]	≥18,786
KILLED UK	113
KILLED OTHER COALITION	113
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	645
KILLED CONTRACTORS	341
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 34,887
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 43,336
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 185,000+

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	317
WOUNDED/INJURED US	876
KILLED COALITION	91
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	453
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS	32,034

NOTE: SOME NUMBERS DO NOT CHANGE BETWEEN ISSUES BECAUSE UPDATED FIGURES ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

To see the demographic data on the casualties go to www.militarycity.com/2000casualties

AFTERTHOUGHTS

FORGOTTEN SACRIFICE

F. John Duresky - The Washington Post - 05 July 2006 - *The writer is an Air Force captain stationed in Iraq.*

A few days ago, as I do every day in Iraq, I listened to the commander's battle update. The briefer calmly and professionally described the day's events. Somewhere in Iraq, on some forgotten, dusty road, an insurgent fighting an occupying army detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) under a Humvee, killing an American soldier. The briefer fielded a question from the general and moved to the next item in the update.

The day before that, in America, a 15-year-old's incredibly rich parents planned the biggest sweet 16 party ever. They will spend more than \$200,000 on an opulent event marking a single year in an otherwise unremarkable life. The soon-to-be-16 girl doesn't know where Iraq is and doesn't care. That same day an American soldier died in Iraq.

Two days earlier, a 35-year-old man went shopping for home entertainment equipment. He had the toughest time selecting the correct plasma screen; he could afford the biggest and best of everything. In the end, he had it installed by a specialty store. He spent about \$50,000 on the whole system. He has never met anybody serving in the military nor served himself, but thinks we should "turn the whole place into a parking lot." That day, another American soldier died in Iraq.

Three days earlier, some college students had a great kegger. There were tons of babes at the party, the music was awesome. Everybody got totally blitzed, and many missed class the next day. The young men all registered for the draft when they were 18, but even though our nation is at war, they aren't the least bit worried about the draft. It is politically impossible to conscript young people today, we are told. That day, another American "volunteer" died in Iraq.

Four days earlier, a harried housewife looked all over town for the perfect accessory for her daughter's upcoming recital. Her numerous chores wore her out, but she still found herself preoccupied. Her oldest son is having trouble in his first year of college, and he has been talking of enlisting in the Army. She is terrified that her child will go off to that horrible war she sees on TV. She and her husband decide to give their son more money so he doesn't have to work part-time; maybe that will help with his studies. That day, another soldier died.

Yesterday millions of Americans celebrated Independence Day. They attended parties and barbecues. Families came together from all across the country to celebrate the big day. Millions of dollars were spent on fireworks. At public events, there were speeches honoring the people who served and those who made the ultimate sacrifice. These words mostly fell on bored ears. While the country celebrated its own greatness, other Americans were still fighting in Iraq.

Today Americans go back to their normal business. The politicians in Washington have made sure the sacrifices of the war are borne by the very smallest percentage of Americans. They won't even change the tax rates to prevent deficits from running out of control. Future generations will pay the cost of this war.

Many Americans feel strongly about the war one way or another, but they aren't signing up their children for service or taking the protest to the streets. What can they do? It is they whom we in the military trust to influence our leaders in Washington.

Today, as on every other day in Iraq, American servicemen are in very real danger. Our country is at war. Mothers, fathers, wives, husbands and children are worrying about their loved ones in a faraway land. They all hope he or she isn't the one whose luck runs out today.

I GUESS THAT WHEN THE CONSTITUTION SAYS, "CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR PROHIBITING THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF", IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT THE VA CAN'T. SHAMEFUL! FALLEN SOLDIER GETS A BRONZE STAR BUT NO PAGAN STAR

Alan Cooperman - Washington Post Staff Writer - July 4, 2006; A02

At the Veterans Memorial Cemetery in the small town of Fernley, Nev., there is a wall of brass plaques for local heroes. But one space is blank. There is no memorial for Sgt. Patrick D. Stewart.

That's because Stewart was a Wiccan, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has refused to allow a symbol of the Wicca religion -- a five-pointed star within a circle, called a pentacle -- to be inscribed on U.S. military memorials or grave markers.

The department has approved the symbols of 38 other faiths; about half of are versions of the Christian cross. It also allows the Jewish Star of David, the Muslim crescent, the Buddhist wheel, the Mormon angel, the nine-pointed star of Bahai and something that looks like an atomic symbol for atheists.

<More at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/03/AR2006070300968.html>>

NOTICE

If at any time you cannot open a link in this newsletter to an article or web page that interests you, please let me know at scook@vuft; I keep a copy of most of the full articles, or can research an alternative route to the information. [Ed.]

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EDITOR'S NOTE: I have been asked what guides my selection of articles. In general, I try to stick with articles that deal exclusively with our target group: serving military, veterans, retirees, and their families. I also favor articles that deal with the effect of Legislative or Executive inaction or bad actions that adversely affect our target group. I try not to pick those articles that have already been beaten to death in the regular press, but rather try to bring the reader articles that he or she might not run across in another medium. While we are non-partisan, I do not believe articles critical of government actions to be partisan as long as they are accurate and fair. Criticism, like dissent, is fair. Finally, I screen hundreds of articles for inclusions and for every article I include, I throw five or six away – good articles, but not as important as the ones selected.

I always appreciate contributions, whether it is opinion in Letter-to-the-Editor form, or articles that the reader believes would be good for our readership. Since I get a chance to vent once in awhile in these newsletters, I will certainly consider Op-Ed copy for inclusion. I always welcome reader comment or complaint. [Sandy Cook](mailto:scook@vuft), Editor

ADD-ON: A SMALL TOWN WELCOMES ONE OF ITS OWN HOME FROM IRAQ

I received the following email from my daughter on 29 June, and went on line to retrieve the article quoted below. I felt compelled to share this with all of you. Maybe when every town and village in the country has had to do this, they will start to ask – Why? Ed.

Hi, Dad:

Well, it has finally happened. Mendocino County has lost her first soldier to the Iraq war. Sgt Jason Buzzard, age 31. Leaves behind a wife and two children. You met Amy; her husband Ray, is Jason's cousin. His body came home early Wednesday morning. Ukiah area residents turned out en force to see him home. This picture is of our fire engine and personnel on an over pass at the City limits at about 2 am as the motorcade with his body passed. They then joined the procession. Ray was on duty in Lake County and his brother, Ken was on duty in Ukiah. (They both work for the California Department of Forestry (CDF)). Ray, in his engine, met the motorcade at the north Lake County line and escorted it to the south county line bordering Mendocino County, where Ken, in his CDF engine, picked up the motorcade and escorted it into and through town to the mortuary. (I cry just telling you about it.) There was a California Highway Patrol escort from the airport in Sacramento, with a veterans group. A Vietnam Vet motorcycle group joined the procession in Lake County. Law Enforcement and Fire Departments were present at every overpass all along the route starting in Arbuckle, just north of Sacramento. By the time they reached the mortuary there were over 100 vehicles, all with lights and sirens. The streets were lined with residents of the county. I am pretty proud of our little community.

Thinking of you. I love you and I am glad you came home.



California Department of Forestry fire truck honoring Sgt Jason Buzzard as the hearse carrying his body passed under an overpass in Mendocino County, CA

Picture by Peter Armstrong



Police and citizens greeting Sgt Jason Buzzard the hearse bearing his body arrives home at 2 AM after a 140-mile escorted trip from the airport.

Picture by Isaac Ekel, Ukiah Daily Journal

And from the Daily Journal article by Gary Greenough (edited for length):

"I had the honor and privilege to escort Jason Buzzard and his family home from Sacramento. It's 4:45 a.m., I have just gotten home, and I need to thank some people, and let you all know how it went.

The plane was delayed for over five hours with mechanical problems, and it finally touched down at Sacramento International at 10:30 p.m. The sheriff and CHP officers did the duty of the Honors Team by unloading Jason from the plane and into the hearse. Rick Eversole was the greatest. We headed out, the towns of Arbuckle and Williams had fire trucks and people on the overpasses.

On Highway 20, the work crew stopped what they were doing and took off their hard hats, even the flaggers stood at attention with hats off; a number of people were along the Highway 20 corridor at Clear Lake; fire trucks from Potter Valley and Redwood Valley lined Highway 20, firefighters at attention and saluting; on the 101, every overpass was filled with every type of engine, with firefighters at attention or holding flags; and people of Ukiah, my hometown, you were wonderful, staying the course and showing what a small town is all about.

I was stunned at the number of people on Perkins, State and Low Gap. The Vietnam Vets Motorcycle club first asked to participate, and they staged at Blue Lakes, and at the invite of the CHP, joined the procession, not behind it, but in it, veterans honoring a veteran.

... special thanks to the CHP, who without their willing help, this would not have happened. CHP officers were in full dress uniform at the airport, and when no Army Honors Team was available, they stepped up and did the honors. They escorted us from the airport to Low Gap Road, changing cars along the route.

And then the people of Ukiah. You make me proud to have grown up there. We have done a number of these escorts, and by far, you showed what a small town is all about. Thank you, thank you, thank you, for staying the course, lining the streets at that late hour, to pay honors to your fallen neighbor, friend and veteran. I hope to see all of you at the funeral on Friday. I can say no more than thank you, one and all.

Gary Greenough is the American Legion Post Commander 21, Motor Escort Team, Santa Rosa, CA.